

Common Concerns about the Reflective Piece in the Writing Assessment Portfolio

- This piece may come from a language arts class, but it might also be developed in a content area class. It doesn't have to be specifically a language arts piece, particularly if it developed as a result of a literacy experience in that content. If it were developed in a content area class, it would count as a content area piece.
- In the reflective piece for the portfolio, a student might refer to a piece included in his portfolio as an example to support his reflection, but there is **no need to refer to all pieces**. Likewise, a student may choose not to refer directly to any piece and look at the collection as a whole to reflect on literacy development.
- If students' reflective pieces are unique as the students are individually, the reflective pieces are probably on target, and the students are reflecting on their own personal writing and literacy growth.
- If all of the reflective pieces seem to sound alike, students are not doing the proper kind of thinking and analysis the reflective piece calls for. This would not make a portfolio incomplete, but the piece would probably not score very well.
- There is not one "right" way to write this piece. It will vary from student to student; however, there are several characteristics that show strong reflection in writing.

A strong reflective piece would, most likely, illustrate many, if not all, of these characteristics:

- Demonstrates specific literacy experiences that show impact/growth in writing.
- Demonstrates significance of literacy experiences through insightful analysis of learning events.
- Targets a specific audience and shows careful consideration of audience's needs to clearly communicate the purpose of the piece.
- Demonstrates careful idea development and makes connections to writing by way of literacy growth experiences.
- Demonstrates clear organization with insightful connections through analysis and reflection.
- Demonstrates narration of experience for the transactive purpose of analyzing growth in literacy to show impact on writing and learning (may narrate an event for the transactive purpose of informing)
- Demonstrates careful choice of form given purpose and audience.
- Is very individual to the student and his/her learning experiences.
- Demonstrates student clearly understands his/her literacy goals.

Saturday, March 11, 2000

Dear Reader,

Upon my father's desk is perched a photograph taken about ten years ago. It is a picture of me, scrawny, frizzy-haired, and grinning toothlessly with pride in my creation: a red sweatshirt I'd decorated in art class with the crudely formed letters of my name showing through a whirlwind of colorful splatters. My art was somewhat characteristic of my writing at the time. Each could express simple ideas but on the whole was relatively simple, unstructured, and unoriginal.

Like most young scholars, the quality of my writing was always just a few steps behind that of my reading, and as the difficulty of my reading progressed, my writing ability improved proportionally. By second grade, I was pouring over *Sweet Valley* books, and in third grade I read my first L.M. Montgomery novel *Anne of Green Gables*, both of which became instant and hapless addictions. I lost nearly three years of valuable reading time to such worthless serials and sentimental Victorian novels about delightfully rebellious Canadian orphan girls. During this time, my writing showed little improvement. I gained absolutely nothing from *Sweet Valley Twins*, and besides teaching me to write complex sentences (which did at least win me the exuberant praise of my elementary school teachers), L.M. Montgomery probably did me more harm than good. Even now I battle verbosity, a malady I am certain grew from overdosing on flowery Victorian literature at an early age.

Through elementary school, my writing was bland, my stories like faded chalk drawings made with only a few pale pastels. Like the tales I read, they were pretty but lacked both meaning and life. Fortunately, Tom Sawyer and Bilbo Baggins came to the rescue, hoisting me from my rut of girlie fiction. Without my realizing it, in expanding my reading list, I was adding colors to my palette. My style was finally showing some progress. My improvements were checked though by the simple fact that they were unconscious. I had never in my reading or my own writing questioned what separated the good from the bad. I was completely oblivious to technique. I knew how to choose fancy words, or mix my colors, but when it came to putting them on paper, I used about as much precision as Jackson Pollock. If the effect produced was pleasing, it was largely by chance.

In about the eighth or ninth grade, my father gave me a copy of *The Elements of Style*. This was like handing a painter a new set of brushes of all different shapes and sizes: large wash brushes for covering a lot of area all at once, fan-shaped brushes for painting wild sprays of color, and extra slender brushes for fine detailing. For the first time, I began

to examine why writers make certain decisions about diction, syntax, organization, and the other "elements of style." As I looked for how I could improve my own writing using similar techniques, my scatterings of words and phrases began to show some structure and planning. There was reason behind the choice and placement of each word, phrase, clause, and paragraph. With my new set of brushes, I could craft with more clarity what I wished to express.

As my reading list grew through the next three years to include such complex works as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Beloved*, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, I strove to make my own writing as vibrant and original, though I was usually discomfited with the result. I experimented some with symbolism and interesting analogies. By reading more poetry, I learned the importance of economy and began to exercise it in my prose.

My writing gradually advanced to the level of a painting by one of the Realists, a Corot or a Millet, for example. There is now definite structure to my writing, and my ideas are clear, but their expression still lacks the character, vivacity, and originality of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Perhaps though, reading does not help these things. Character and originality might be elements only life experience can supply, in which case, chance alone governs how my writing will grow. For now, I can only paint away at the evolving mural of my life and wonder where it will take me next.

Sincerely,